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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002835

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/11/12

TAGS: PREL MOPS MASS KPKO NI IV

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: IVOIRIEN CEASE-FIRE WILL TAKE MORE WORK

REF: (A) Jeter-Perry 10/11/02 Telcon

(B) SECSTATE 196827

(C) ABIDJAN 3330

(D) ABIDJAN 3381

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER; REASONS 1.5 (B)  
AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: During an October 9 conversation with Ambassador Jeter, ECOWAS Executive Secretary Chambas summarized his visit to Cote d'Ivoire, stating Gbagbo's insistence that the mutineers relinquish their weapons and his reluctance to "legitimize" the rebels were the main hurdles to a cease-fire agreement. Chambas found the rebel leaders disciplined and relatively flexible. They disavowed an intention to overthrow Gbagbo and Chambas saw no evidence of Burkinafabe involvement. Chambas planned to return to Cote d'Ivoire October 12 hoping to carry with him an amended cease-fire agreement that Gbagbo might sign. As part of a cease-fire arrangement, Chambas envisioned deployment of 250-500 monitors and suggested that ECOWAS would ask the USG and other governments to provide logistical and financial support for their eventual deployment. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) During an October 9 meeting with Ambassador (accompanied by PolCouns and POLMIL), ECOWAS Executive Secretary Chambas and Deputy Executive Secretary Diarra

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indicated they had made some progress and were somewhat encouraged by their meetings with the rebel leaders. However, they were ultimately unable to get Gbagbo to sign the cease-fire agreement. Despite the difficulties with Gbagbo, Chambas and Diarra underscored ECOWAS' commitment to peacefully resolve the crisis. Chambas shared his plans to return to Cote d'Ivoire on October 12 to begin another round of discussions.

13. (C) The ECOWAS officials recognized that more than Ivoirien stability was at stake. Should this situation linger other countries, such as Liberia and Burkina Faso, could be drawn into the tempest. Moreover, the already weak national economies in Cote d'Ivoire's immediate neighborhood would suffer should the Ivoirien economy be paralyzed; already prices in Mali had risen exorbitantly, Diarra noted. Due to rising Ivoirien xenophobia, thousands of Burkinabe and Malians have already returned home, placing unneeded strain on those nations' weak social services.

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Gbagbo the Reluctant and Stubborn  
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14. (C) Gbagbo was the hurdle to a quick cease-fire, Chambas explained. Gbagbo claimed the draft cease-fire proposed was unsatisfactory because it "legitimized" the rebels and their seizure of territory. Gbagbo wanted a document that gave an unequivocal ECOWAS endorsement of his government. Gbagbo emphasized an agreement must specifically state that negotiations between the sides are based on the recognition that his administration is the legally constituted government of Cote d'Ivoire and that its authority must be accepted by the rebels.

15. (C) As a corollary, Gbagbo was adamant that the mutineers disarm before a cease-fire could be established. Chambas felt that Gbagbo took this inflexible tack because he was hamstrung by hard-liners within his own administration and military. The Minister of Defense and the Colonel in charge of the soldiers deployed in the Bouake area wanted to "redeem their honor" after being stung by the rebels. The military wanted an offensive and would react negatively if Gbagbo appeared too soft on the rebels. Also, the tide of public opinion in Abidjan supported the hard-liners, Chambas noted.

16. (C) Chambas believed the key to getting Gbagbo's signature was to amend the agreement in such a way that demonstrated the superior legal status of the Government yet without alienating the rebels by implying that they are common criminals. Chambas said the angle he planned to take was to present a new document to Gbagbo, telling him, that after consultations with President Wade, the document was amended to accommodate the GOCI's reservations.

(COMMENT: While we cannot be sure, the Senegalese document contained in reftel D may have been transmitted to the GOCI by Dakar without Chambas' input. It might not be what he had in mind. This may indicate that coordination between Wade and Chambas is not perfect. We hope that it clarifies rather than muddies the situation. END COMMENT)

17. (C) Chambas stated that after returning to Dakar from Abidjan, he and President Wade agreed that Malian President Toure (ATT) would head the ECOWAS contact group on Cote d'Ivoire. The contact group would be ineffective without one of the six Presidents having a mandate to act on behalf of the entire group. Gathering six Presidents for meetings would prove difficult, Chambas feared. ATT was selected because of Mali's manifest interests in events in Cote d'Ivoire and because Gbagbo trusts him. Chambas added that Gbagbo also placed great trust in Ghana's Kufuor, who has been in regular contact with Gbagbo urging him to exercise restraint and statesmanship.

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The Rebels: More Reasonable than Expected

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18. (C) The rebel leaders made a better than expected impression on Chambas and Diarra. Chambas stated that the rebels appeared disciplined, rational and also flexible in their discussions. The two primary rebel leaders agreed to a cease-fire and disavowed that they wanted Gbagbo's removal. They argued for the safe return of Ivoirians still in exile. When Ambassador Jeter asked Chambas about the practicality of President Obasanjo's informal proposal to provide the rebels safe-haven outside of Cote d'Ivoire, Chambas replied that most of the rebels were in their twenties and thirties. He saw the provision of educational opportunities, hopefully in a "distant and cold climate", as a safety valve for many of the rebels. Others would simply like to remain in Cote d'Ivoire, but without the threat of retribution from the authorities.

19. (C) When asked about foreign involvement in the conflict, Chambas and Diarra said the GOIC provided no "credible evidence" of mercenaries or foreign government support. The rebel leaders admitted to Chambas that many rebels had lived in exile in Burkina Faso prior to the rebellion. However, during his conversations with GOBF officials, he was reminded that it has long been Burkinabe policy to grant asylum to Ivoirien exiles. Even Gbagbo was a past beneficiary of Burkinabe hospitality. It would be wrong to deduce Burkinabe complicity just because some of the rebels had lived there.

10. (C) Turning to ECOWAS participation in the cease-fire arrangement, Chambas envisioned 250-500 monitors from the member states. If it would enhance the confidence of either side, ECOWAS was willing to ask non-ECOWAS African states to furnish a complement of monitors as well. He did not foresee this presence to be the inter-positional force advocated by some in the region. Instead, he saw this deployment as having a mandate limited to monitoring cease-fire compliance. He felt a presence of this size would be a sufficient confidence-builder, provided the two sides actually had the will to observe the cease-fire. Chambas intimated that ECOWAS probably would look to the U.S., U.K., France and other donors for financial and logistical assistance for the deployment.

11. (C) COMMENT: Chambas has his work cut out for him. He must diplomatically thread the needle by amending the cease-fire agreement to Gbagbo's liking while not alienating the rebels. Additionally, he must contend with the mercurial interventions and unpredictability of ECOWAS' Chairman Wade. Despite these obstacles, there is no doubt that ECOWAS remains actively engaged, as evinced by Chambas' planned return to Cote d'Ivoire. More importantly, ECOWAS remains committed to a negotiated settlement. We must continue to encourage Chambas while also urging leaders in the region whom Gbagbo trusts (ATT, Kufuor and Obasanjo) to point their Ivoirien counterpart toward the negotiation table. END COMMENT.

¶12. (C) UPDATE: Chambas phoned Ambassador on October 11 to report that Senegalese Foreign Minister Gadio was currently in Abidjan and had established contact with the rebels. As reported Ref. A, Chambas provided his view that Gbagbo seemed to be softening his hard-line stance, and now appeared more disposed toward an agreement with the rebels.  
JETER